

Farewell (II)

Kawkab al-Sharq (Hadith al-Massa), 12 April 1933.

For the first time since the Prime Minister's illness, he was able to visit one of the government's ministries; he went yesterday afternoon to the Ministry of the Interior, bidding farewell to the men who had worked with him there for years! Everything at that hour was pale and overcast, casting upon the soul a thin garment of pallor and sorrow. The day was in its last hour, the sun sinking toward its setting, and there was in the air something of that vague, general sadness stirred by the sun's inclination to set, and the withdrawal of its light from things; and the Prime Minister was, in all likelihood, animated, but with the animation of the weary! Smiling, but with the smile of the grieving! And the men of the Interior were, in all likelihood, delighted to meet their minister after illness had kept him from them for more than two months, yet grieved that they were meeting him only to bid him farewell, not to work alongside him!

The Prime Minister's address to them was not without praise for them, encouragement to them, and hope for the success they would meet tomorrow, resembling the success granted them yesterday?! But the Prime Minister's voice was, in all likelihood, calm and composed, closer to a murmur than to the clear, ringing tone people had known of him! And perhaps a note of regret and sorrow echoed in the tones of that voice, expressing the former Minister of the Interior's grief at parting from the comrades who had risen with him to bear these heavy burdens that weigh down even strong men!

Everything, then, was sorrowful in this visit from its beginning with the evening to its end with the first hour of night, even the Prime Minister's words to the journalists who attended his visit; for this address was pale, wan, and gloomy, betraying effort and exhaustion! Consider the Prime Minister as he tells the journalists he will go to his office at the Presidency in the evening rather than the morning! When once he used to go to his offices at dawn and not leave them until night had advanced! And he will spend two hours at his office, when once he used to spend there the whole brightness of the day and a portion of the darkness of the night! And he will lighten his load of meetings and receive no one, when once he used to receive people at daybreak, and at morning, and at evening, and at dusk, and under the very cover of darkness...! And he will lighten his load of work and attend to nothing but what is urgent. When

once he let no matter, great or small, pass without summoning it before him, turning it over inside and out, dwelling upon it at length, examining it closely, and arguing it until he wearied those who argued with him...!

And his attendance at his office will not continue long, but only until he can travel to Europe to rest, hastening his pursuit of recovery, or recovery's pursuit of him. Yet he had once been the most reluctant of men to travel, the most eager of men to remain in place, the most desirous of men to personally oversee everything — not only in the Ministries of Finance and the Interior alone, but in everything connected to the other ministries as well — and the people add that he will attend the sessions of Parliament from time to time, whenever circumstances permit...!

All this saddens! And all this distresses! For however great the people's enmity toward the Prime Minister, however great the people's indignation at the Prime Minister's policy, did they wish his rule to end in an ending better than this one?! Did they wish the war between him and them to remain fierce and strong until he relinquished power, rather than be, as it is now, a war with no warrior to fight, an assault upon one too weary even to defend himself...?

Everything yesterday was sorrowful and gloomy when the Prime Minister visited the Ministry of the Interior in farewell, and everything today and tomorrow will be pale and gloomy when the Prime Minister goes to the People's Party, or to the office of the Presidency; for the Prime Minister has lost that strength which once stirred strength in his partisans and helpers, and that vigor which once stirred vigor in his helpers and partisans. The Prime Minister has grown listless, and so the people around him have grown listless! Weak, and so the people around him have grown weak! Gloomy, and so the people around him have grown gloomy.

And it is no wonder that people grow listless after vigor, weak after strength, gloomy after cheer; for these are the accidents of life, and none of us is spared encountering them, taking from them a share small or great. What is strange, rather, is that people should bear these burdens and yet refuse to acknowledge them! That people should submit to these accidents and yet insist on conducting their affairs regardless! As though nothing had befallen them! As though no event had struck them! As though they still possessed all the strength, vigor, and composure they need to manage their affairs!

Is the Prime Minister choosing to remain in power and rise to its heavy burdens, despite this weakness that admits of no doubt? If so, how fitting it would be for those who love him and are gentle with him to take pity on him, to lighten this burden for him, and to leave him free to enjoy his full share of rest.

Or is the Prime Minister compelled to remain in power, so as to allow those charged with the conduct of politics time to search and reflect on what change might be possible? If so, how harsh is politics! How far it is from gentleness! How excessive its demands upon its own people for a sacrifice that does not scruple to extend even to health itself!

And what harshness resembles this harshness, which compels to labor a man who might wish, more than anything else, to lay down his labor and rest?!

And whether the Prime Minister chooses to remain in power or is compelled to it, the life of nations itself is harsher than politics, harsher than circumstances, harsher than these considerations that call for gentleness and impose courtesy upon people. This life of nations cannot entrust its reins except to those who are truly able to manage it, and who can devote to it their time, their efforts, and their thought.

And the Prime Minister is not now one who is able to do this. The man has thought, and thought at length; he has weighed, and weighed at length; he has consulted the physicians, and consulted them often; and it is most likely that he bargained with them, and pressed hard in the bargaining, and most likely that they resisted him, and were excessive in their resistance; and the matter ended between them with their permitting him two hours to devote to affairs of state for some days before he travels to Europe, on condition that these matters be light, free of hardship and strain.

This is the utmost the man can manage, and it is the utmost the physicians can permit, and it is the least that a man occupied with public life can offer to public life — and where do two hours fall within the life of Egypt? And where do a few days fall within this life? And how can it occur to those charged with Egyptian politics that affairs can be conducted on such a basis? Or that any order could be established upon it? Had the ministers whom Sidqi Pasha placed in positions of government been able to hold firm in those positions, and rise to their burdens, it would not have been permissible for the ministry and its head to remain ill to this degree; how much less so, when everyone — the English foremost among

them — believes that these ministers are too powerless to bear the burdens of government on their own, or to manage its weight independently, for they were placed in their posts only to assist their chief in directing it, not to direct it independently themselves.

Everything calls for this ministry to relinquish power: the health of its head, and the interest of Egypt — I do not say its true interest, for this is not the time in which true interest is given any weight — but rather the interest of this order that Sidqi Pasha himself has instituted. All of this calls for this ministry to resign, that the sick man may rest, and that this nascent order, if there is no avoiding the attempt to preserve it, may find someone able to carry that attempt forward.

How fitting it would be for the Prime Minister, and for those who support him in his post, to read a certain dramatic tale, comic on its surface and wholly admonitory beneath — the tale of *The Litigants* (*Les Plaideurs*), composed by the French writer Racine, which what we face today cannot help but recall to us!